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ABSTRACT

This booklet examines adult education needs and opportunities for incarcerated persons from the perspective of experts and former inmates. The booklet considers adult learning a basic human right and a crucial step towards the reintegration and the rehabilitation of prisoners and that there is a great demand for learning in correctional institutions. At the same time, conference workshop participants felt that the demand was not being met appropriately. Future strategies and the issue of the right to adult education for inmates were raised. In addition, the workshop explored ways to continue and improve cooperation and networking among those who are involved in prison education. The booklet concludes that it is imperative to recognize prisoners' right to learn and to provide programs and curricula that can facilitate their learning. (KC)

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A series of 29 booklets documenting workshops held at the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education

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8c Adult learning for prisoners

Adult learning for prisoners

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This publication has been produced by the UNESCO Institute for Education within the context of the follow-up to the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V), held in Hamburg in 1997.

Readers are reminded that the points of view, selection of facts, and the opinions expressed in the booklets are those that were raised by panellists, speakers and participants during the workshop sessions and therefore do not necessarily coincide with official positions of the UNESCO or of the UNESCO Institute for Education Hamburg. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the UNESCO Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country or territory, or its authorities, or concerning the delimitations of the frontiers of any country or territory.

Theme 8: Adult learning and groups with special needs
Booklets under this theme:
8a Adult learning and ageing populations
8b Migrant education
8c Adult learning for prisoners
8d Making education accessible and available to all persons with disabilities

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Foreword

In July 1997 the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education was held in Hamburg, organised by UNESCO and in particular the UNESCO Institute for Education, the agency's specialist centre on adult learning policy and research. Approximately 1500 delegates attended from all regions of the world, with representatives of 140 member states and some 400 NGOs. In addition to the work of the commissions and plenary which debated the official documents of the Conference The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, there were 33 workshops organised around the themes and sub-themes of the Conference.

As part of its CONFINTEA follow-up strategy, the UNESCO Institute for Education has produced this series of 29 booklets based on the presentations and discussions held during the Conference. The recordings of all the workshops were transcribed and synthesized over one year, edited, and then formatted and designed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into this process. Linda King, coordinator of the monitoring and information strategy for CONFINTEA, was responsible for overseeing the whole process. Madhu Singh, senior research specialist at UIE, undertook the mammoth task of writing almost all the booklets based on an analysis of the sessions. She was helped in the later stages by Gonzalo Retamal, Uta Papen and Linda King. Christopher McIntosh was technical editor, Matthew Partridge designed the layout and Janna Lowrey was both transcriber and translator.

The booklets are intended to draw out the central issues and concerns of each of the CONFINTEA workshops. They are the memory of an event that marked an important watershed in the field of adult learning. We hope that they will be of use both to those who were able to attend CONFINTEA V and those who were not. We look forward to your comments, feedback and continuing collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Education.

Paul Bélanger,
Director, UNESCO Institute for Education, Hamburg
and Secretary General of CONFINTEA

Adult learning for prisoners

Introduction

A prison sentence is intended as a deprivation of liberty. But, all over the world, it usually means a violation and deprivation of many other human rights as well, including the right to adult education. Access to adult learning is not only a basic human right. It is a crucial step towards the reintegration and the rehabilitation of prisoners.

These and other issues were discussed at the Workshop "Adult Learning for Prisoners" at the UNESCO's Fifth International Conference on Adult Education held in Hamburg in July 1997. Former inmates spoke about their experiences. Their presentations revealed that adult learning in prisons should go beyond just training. The demand for learning opportunities in prisons was widely expressed. At the same time it was felt that this demand was not being met by appropriate provisions. The discussions looked into initiatives for improving learning possibilities in prisons. Future strategies and the issue of the right to adult education for inmates were raised. Most importantly, the workshop explored ways to continue and improve co-operation and networking among those involved in prison education.

The chair of the session was Robert Badinter, former Minister of Justice in the French Government and former President of France's Constitutional Council. Speakers included Bernard Bolze, Observatoire International des Prisons; Jean-Claude Delcorps, Ex-Inmate, Belgium; Pastora Ortega, Secretariado Paz, Justicia, y no Violencia, Nicaragua; Zoongo Marie-Lea, Union Inter-Africaine des Droits de l'Homme, Burkina Faso.

It was stressed that in many countries, including industrialised ones, human rights abuses in prisons are still common. Prisoners are denied access to the most basic services such as personal hygiene, health and nutrition. Advocacy for the education of prisoners is therefore difficult, but vitally necessary.

The rights of prison inmates

The international legal framework

Most countries have signed and ratified the international and regional human rights legal instruments which ensure better detention conditions for prisoners. These include, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the African Charter on Human and Populations Rights, the Convention against Torture and other Degrading Treatments, the Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (1955).

Rules and basic principles for the treatment of prisoners adopted by the United Nations.

1 Provision shall be made for the further education of all prisoners capable of profiting thereby, including religious instruction in the countries where this is possible. The education of illiterates and young prisoners shall be compulsory and special attention shall be paid to it by the administration.
2 So far as practicable, the education of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education without difficulty.

Article 77 Standard Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners.
Adopted by the first United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders, held at Geneva in 1955.

Conditions shall be created enabling prisoners to undertake meaningful remunerated employment which will facilitate their reintegration into the country's labour market and permit them to contribute to their own financial support and to that of their families.
Article 8 Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners
Adopted and proclaimed by General Assembly on 14 December 1990

In spite of the existence of international and regional frameworks, there is a lack of an international body to ensure the enforcement of international laws. In many countries national laws have not been adapted to the international rules and principles concerning the treatment of prisoners. Nor are national policies designed to implement the provisions of ratified covenants and treaties. In many countries there are no laws on the administration of penitentiary services. In others, numerous bills and amendments lie unapproved, gathering dust. In particular, there is a widespread lack of provision for the education of adult prison inmates.

The situation: detention conditions in prisons

Hardships endured by prisoners are numerous. Inadequate infrastructure and the lack of space are major concerns. Children are separated from adults and detained in separate wings. Hygiene is precarious, and basic sanitation services are scarce.

In many countries detention centres exist that were built during the colonial period. These centres are old and badly maintained. Prisons are overcrowded, and the separation of women from men is often not enforced. Equipment and furniture are minimal. Health care for inmates is not provided on a regular basis owing to lack of personnel and medicines. Prisoners very often lack basic sanitary necessities including soap. Even food is a problem, and relatives often have to bring it from outside. Given this situation, it is not difficult to understand why governments do not view the right to education for prisoners as a priority.

Education for adult prison inmates

The Declaration of Kampala recommends that: "The prisoners must have access to education and to a vocational training providing them a chance to a better reintegration into the society after their release." The basic objectives of education for prisoners are:

- to teach them new skills;
- to help them retain previous vocational skills, necessary for their later social reintegration.

Yet, even where such programmes exist, they often have severe shortcomings. Many prison training programmes are not linked with the regular educational system outside the prisons. As a result, the transition from one to the other is hard to make. Adult education programmes in prison seldom give information on the rights of individuals. Little or no attempt is made to promote creativity. Little attention is paid to the personal biographies of prison inmates.

A serious problem is the lack of a national curriculum. Consequently, when prisoners change prisons, they are confronted with an adult learning system which is completely different from the one they have previously been exposed to.

There is nevertheless a general consensus that adult education for prisoners is a fundamental step towards their social reintegration. The following are some of the important considerations for the development of successful policies in this area.

- Education practices that stress personal development should be advocated for prison inmates.
- Adult vocational education must take into account other dimensions of the educational process such as personal development and attitudinal change.
- The education process should begin as soon as the inmate is sentenced. It is also crucial to offer adult educational opportunities after the release of prison inmates. This would maximise the possibility of social reintegration.
- The issue of motivation to study is also fundamental in adult learning for prison inmates. The problem is not only an individual motivational one but also a social problem. The involvement of many other actors needs to taken into account, including the

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attitudes of guardians and of other inmates. Other issues relate to the choice between studying and working and of creating a learning environment in prisons.

- All adult education projects must try to link adult learning with the social context of the learner. It is necessary to take into account the variety of social contexts of prison inmates when designing adult learning projects:
  - the social context of delinquency;
  - the social context in prisons;
  - the social context after prison life.

More research is needed on these contexts as well as on illustrating/demonstrating the relationship between adult education in prisons and the process of rehabilitation.

Education should be seen not only as the imparting of skills and knowledge. Most importantly it should be viewed as inculcating values and attitudes enabling the individual to take control of his own life. At the same time it is important to start a debate on the issue of what education should mean to prison inmates. The inmates themselves should be an integral part of this debate. They should air their views on society, on the way it is organised and on the issue of law and order.

The experiences of adult education for prisoners

Provisions for adult education in prisons in many countries are minimal or non-existent. Where education facilities do exist, these are subject to governmental constraints with regard to teaching materials and equipment. Access is also restricted on grounds of financial cuts.

Yet, in many countries, including those where resources are scarce, there are examples of good practice. An example from Nicaragua showed how social reintegration of inmates was facilitated by providing them with the possibility to follow a package programme such as Baccalaureate or a course on peace, non- violence and human rights; Such courses promoted self-esteem, solidarity, tolerance and conflict resolution – all of which are crucial to prisoners for their later reintegration into society. The approach adopted is one that encourages programmes to be open to inmates as well as to their relatives and to prison staff. The success of this project can be attributed to the participatory methodology, which uses dynamic and creative educational techniques. A set of educational

handbooks has been published on this project. In fact the project has been so successful that the NGO implementing it has been asked to train local and religious leaders as well as teachers and peasants.

In many countries programmes exist for imparting skills for personal and group development. They focus on promoting dialogue between prisoners in solving problems of conflict or violence. They encourage attitudes of friendliness and respect for human rights. The overriding aim is to promote a culture of peace and social reintegration.

Several adult learning projects that use alternative methodologies are being tried out in many other countries. In Burkina Faso prisoners can choose to take general education or vocational training courses. Literacy courses are offered in the national language in three prisons of the country. In others French is offered. Prisoners are able to enrol for high school education. They can also choose between different vocational trades such as carpentry, weaving, knitting, tailoring or other handicrafts.

There are also agricultural and farming projects in prisons in which prisoners grow rice and raise sheep, cows, pigs and poultry. This contributes to the subsistence needs of prisoners.

Unfortunately such examples do not reflect the situation of prisons the world over. In many countries, such as Vietnam for example, prisoners are prohibited from enrolling for a training course, learning foreign languages or reading books on foreign cultures. Dictionaries are often confiscated and prisoners are still compelled to read books on Marxism. All prison inmates, including the old and disabled, are forced to work.

The educational staff

A top priority in adult learning for prisoners should be designing programmes for the educational staff, who need to understand the value of such education. The staff could include trained prison inmates. Another option could be the training of volunteers. NGO support could concentrate on the design or purchase of educational and didactic materials.

It is important to develop short-term courses that are well tailored to prisoners needs and conditions. The best method of recruiting new adults to learning programmes is to use prisoners' own motivation to promote their own education. Care should be taken to treat these trainers as having the same rights as other trainers outside of prisons.

Problems of adult education for prison inmates

There are many financial, social and political problems in designing programmes of adult education for prison inmates:

Funding

The lack of funds for adult education of prison inmates in developing and developed countries is well known. Budgets granted to the administration of prisons are minimal. Often there is greater urgency in providing prisoners with food, health care and decent housing than adult education.

NGOs and associations have, however, developed initiatives with the support of financial partners. Their aim is to:

- improve the detention conditions of prisoners;
- help them in their social reintegration;
- provide education to prisoners;
- organise information and sensitisation campaigns on human rights among the prisoners and the prison staff.

Social context

The development of education is also hampered by the little public interest in prison education. There is often a negative reaction to the notion of education for prison inmates, particularly in countries where provision and access to education for the general population is limited to a few. In such cases the attitudes of the general population are often biased against providing funding to improve the basic life conditions of prison inmates.

Political reasons

In many countries governments have no national laws relating to education for prisoners. In some countries policies state that education for prison inmates should be restricted to political training. Professional reintegration or rehabilitation is not the aim of such training. In fact reading or other creative activities are often prohibited. This is a clear violation of the right to education. Governments should introduce laws

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to correspond with international declarations to which they are signatories. They should establish policies for adult education in prisons.

The progressive democratisation in many countries in different parts of the world could serve as a crucial context for making prisons more humane. However, true participative democracy can only be achieved when the development of human beings is made the centre of all political decision-making. Prisons should be treated not only as penitentiaries but as places where the prison inmates can learn to understand themselves and the world. Adult education of prison inmates must be seen as a priority by political decision-makers. It is a necessity for successful social reintegration of prison inmates. It can contribute to a real and sustainable development of these countries.

Conclusion

Participants to the CONFINTEA workshop on Adult Learning for Prisoners reiterated the fact that the right to education is a universal right of all people. It was imperative to recognise the right to learn for all prison inmates by:

- providing prison inmates with information on and access to different levels of education and training;
- building a basic national curriculum that can be followed in different prisons;
- developing and implementing comprehensive education programmes in prisons, with the participation of inmates, to meet their educational needs and learning aspirations;
- facilitating the work in prison of non-governmental organisations, teachers and other providers of educational activities.
- providing prisoners with access to educational institutions;
- encouraging initiatives that link courses inside and outside prisons;
- strengthening international co-operation;
- organising a global survey for a better understanding of the situation concerning education in prisons throughout the world;
- revalorising the role of all people working in prisons, informing them of the benefits of adult education in prisons.

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The CONFINTEA logo, designed by Michael Smitheram of Australia, represents the lines on the palm of a hand. These lines are universal and yet different for each subject. They celebrate cultural diversity and the joy of learning.

Theme 8

Adult education and groups with special needs

Booklets under this theme:

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